

The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2002

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Plantin 10/12 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [T_B]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Goffman, Daniel, 1954–

The Ottoman empire and early modern Europe / Daniel Goffman.

p. cm. – (New approaches to European history; 24)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 45280 5 (hardback) – ISBN 0 521 45908 7 (paperback)

1. Turkey – History – Ottoman Empire, 1288–1918. 2. Turkey –
Relations – Europe. 3. Europe – Relations – Turkey. 4. Turkey –
Civilization – European influences. I. Title. II. Series.

DR486 .G62 2002

956.1'015 – dc21

2001043336

ISBN 0 521 45280 5 hardback

ISBN 0 521 45908 7 paperback

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>List of maps</i>	xii
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvi
<i>Note on usage</i>	xix
<i>Chronological table of events</i>	xx
<i>The Ottoman House through 1687</i>	xxiii
1 Introduction. Ottomancentrism and the West	1
Part 1. State and society in the Ottoman world	
<i>Kubad's formative years</i>	23
2 Fabricating the Ottoman state	27
<i>Kubad in Istanbul</i>	55
3 A seasoned polity	59
<i>Kubad at the Sublime Porte</i>	93
4 Factionalism and insurrection	98
Part 2. The Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean and European worlds	
<i>Kubad in Venice</i>	131
5 The Ottoman–Venetian association	137
<i>Kubad between worlds</i>	165
6 Commerce and diasporas	169
<i>Kubad ransomed</i>	189

viii	List of Contents	
	7 A changing station in Europe	192
	8 Conclusion. The Greater Western World	227
	<i>Glossary</i>	235
	<i>Suggestions for further reading</i>	240
	<i>Index</i>	252

Illustrations

- 1 “Frontispiece,” Jean-Jacques Boissard, *Vitae et icones sultanorum turcico*, Frankfurt, 1597–99. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) page 10
- 2 “Muchemet,” Boissard, *Vitae et icones sultanorum turcico*, p. 41. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) 14
- 3 “Divan-tchavousch,” Ignatius Mouradgèa d’Ohsson, *Tableau général de l’Empire othoman, divisé en deux parties, dont l’une comprend la législation mahométane; l’autre, l’histoire de l’Empire othoman*, 1837, vol. III, 2nd plate after p. 294. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) 25
- 4 “Osman,” Philipp Lonicer, *Chronicorum Turcicorum, in quibus Turcorum origo, principes, imperatores, bella . . . et caetera huc pertinentia exponuntur . . . accessere, narratio de Baiazethis filiorum seditionibus, Turcicarum item rerum epitome . . . et Iohannis Aventini liber, in quo ca.*, 1578, vol. I (in one binding), p. 9. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) 32
- 5 “Osman,” Boissard, *Vitae et Icones Sultanorum Turcico*, p. 4. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) 35
- 6 “Torlachi religioso Turco,” Nicolas de Nicolay, *Le navigationi et viaggi nella Turchia*, 1577, p. 207. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) 43
- 7 “Map of Dardanelles Straits and Gallipoli,” Hans Jacob Breuning von Buchenbach, *Orientalische Reyss dess Edlen . . . so er selb ander in der Turkey*, Strasbourg, 1612, p. 42. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) 44

- | | | |
|----|---|-----|
| 8 | “Murad I,” Lonicer, <i>Chronicorum Turcicorum</i> , vol. I (in one binding), p. 11. (Author’s collection.) | 48 |
| 9 | “Appartement,” d’Ohsson, <i>Tableau général de l’Empire othoman</i> , vol. III, before p. 129. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 62 |
| 10 | “Giannizzero Soldato,” Cesare Vecellio, <i>Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo = Vestitus antiquorum recentiorumque totius orbis</i> , Venice, 1598, f. 386r. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 66 |
| 11 | “Cadil Eschier,” Vecellio, <i>Habiti antichi</i> , f. 380r. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 71 |
| 12 | “Ein Spachi,” Johann Helffrich, <i>Kurtzer und warhafftiger Bericht</i> , Leipzig, 1580. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 78 |
| 13 | “Military Commander of Anatolia,” Eberhard Werner Happel, <i>Thesaurus exoticorum oder eine mit ausländischen raritäten und geschichten wohlversehene schatz-kammer</i> , 1688, sec. 2, p. 16. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 79 |
| 14 | “Sipahis and janissaries,” Breuning, <i>Orientalische Reyss dess Edlen</i> , p. 157. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 80 |
| 15 | “Armenians,” Helffrich, <i>Kurtzer und warhafftiger Bericht</i> . (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 86 |
| 16 | “Gentill’ femme Perotte Frangue,” Nicolay, <i>Le navigationi et viaggi nella Turchia</i> . (Author’s collection.) | 88 |
| 17 | “Neubeth,” d’Ohsson, <i>Tableau général de l’Empire othoman</i> , vol. II, after p. 16. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 94 |
| 18 | “Siege of Belgrade,” Lonicer, <i>Chronicorum Turcicorum</i> , vol. II (in one binding), p. 22. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 100 |
| 19 | “Troupes Turques de 1540 à 1580.” (Author’s collection.) | 104 |
| 20 | “Suleyman,” Lonicer, <i>Chronicorum Turcicorum</i> , vol. I (in one binding), p. 34. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 108 |

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 21 | “Ein Janitscher,” Helffrich, <i>Kurtzer und warhafftiger Bericht</i> . (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 114 |
| 22 | “Murad IV,” Happel, <i>Thesaurus exoticorum</i> , sec. 4, following p. 14. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 118 |
| 23 | “Porte d’entrée du sérail,” d’Ohsson, <i>Tableau général de l’Empire othoman</i> , vol. III, before p. 283. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 122 |
| 24 | “Frontispiece,” Michel Baudier, <i>Inventaire de l’histoire générale du serrail</i> , 3rd edn. Paris, 1631. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 160 |
| 25 | “Cimetières d’Eyub,” d’Ohsson, <i>Tableau général de l’Empire othoman</i> , vol. I, after p. 248. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 174 |
| 26 | “Femme d’estat grecque de la ville de Pera,” Nicolay, <i>Le navigationi et viaggi nella Turchia</i> . (Author’s collection.) | 184 |
| 27 | “Célébration de la fête du Mewloud,” d’Ohsson, <i>Tableau général de l’Empire othoman</i> , vol. I, after p. 256. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 188 |
| 28 | “Turco di Grado in Casa,” Vecellio, <i>Habiti antichi</i> , f. 381v. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 200 |
| 29 | “Map of Alexandria,” Helffrich, <i>Kurtzer und warhafftiger Bericht</i> . (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 202 |
| 30 | “Diner d’un ministre Européen,” d’Ohsson, <i>Tableau général de l’Empire othoman</i> , vol. III, after p. 454. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress.) | 223 |

Maps

1 The Ottoman Empire as part of Europe.	<i>page</i> 02
2 Turkoman principalities, <i>c.</i> 1320.	36
3 Istanbul.	53
4 The Ottoman Empire under Süleyman the Magnificent with modern states.	84
5 Ottoman Europe.	102
6 Sixteenth-century empires.	140
7 The Eastern Mediterranean and the Ottomans.	146

1 Introduction: Ottomancentrism and the West

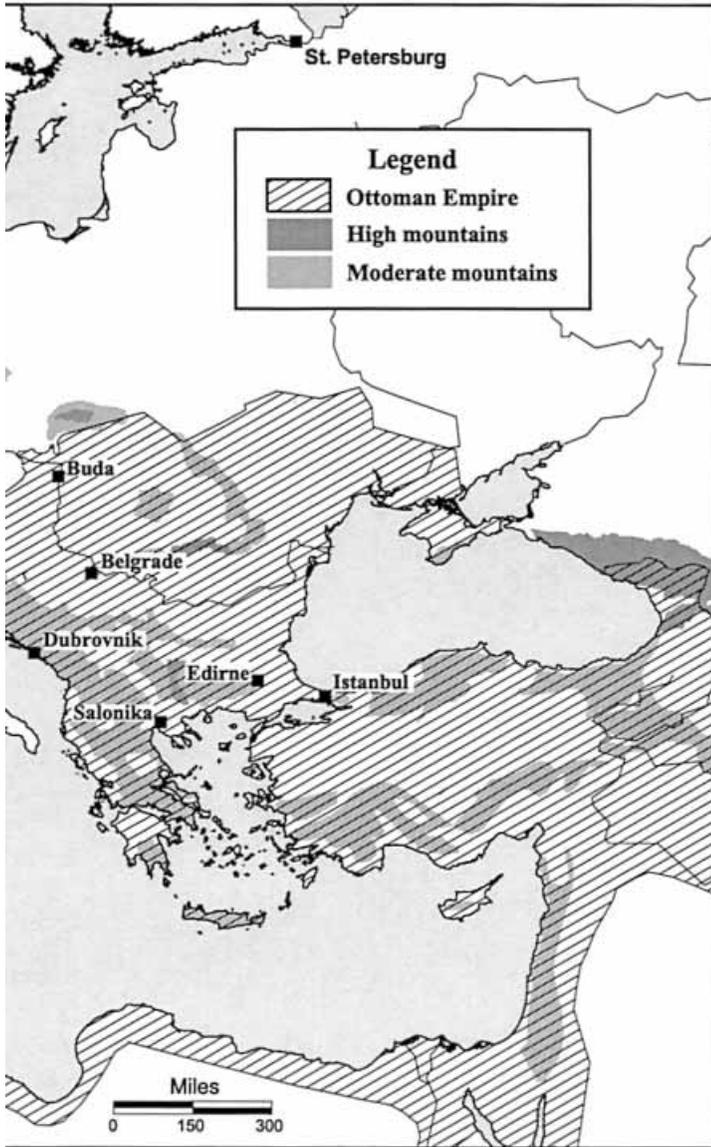
One chapter in a recent history of the Ottomans begins with the assertion that “the Ottoman Empire lived for war.”¹ This statement constitutes a concise précis of a damaging and misleading stereotype, long pervasive in both Europe and the United States. Pursuing this thesis of an acute Ottoman militancy, the author explains that “every governor in this empire was a general; every policeman was a janissary; every mountain pass had its guards, and every road a military destination.” Not only were officials also soldiers, this account declares, but “even madmen had a regiment, the *deli*, or loons, Riskers of their Souls, who were used, since they did not object, as human battering rams, or human bridges.” Indeed, according to this same writer, it was “outbreaks of peace [that] caused trouble at home, as men clamoured for the profit and the glory.” Although these and similar observations strictly speaking may not be wholly false, they certainly are partial (*deli* in modern Turkish indeed suggests “loony” or “deranged”; in Ottoman Turkish, however, a more accurate translation would be “brave” or even “heroic”), dangerously credible, and confirm long-lived Western assumptions that the Ottoman state was thoroughly and relentlessly martial. Even more misleadingly, they imply that such militarism was somehow peculiarly foreign and contrary to Western norms.

The truth is that such portrayals not only privilege a single aspect of a rich and varied world, but also could describe virtually any state in early modern Europe. Did the early modern Habsburg state, the French state,

¹ Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the horizons: a history of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1998), p. 65. In general, though, this is among the most readable and sympathetic of such texts. Indeed, at times it reads like an apologetic, a tone that makes Goodwin’s stress on Ottoman militarism all the more salient. The notion stands at the very core of other books. In his *The Ottoman impact on Europe* (New York, 1968), p. 77, for example, Paul Coles writes: “From the point of their first entrance into history as a nomadic war-band, the Ottomans were carried from one triumph to the next by a ruthless dedication to conquest and predation. . . . The perpetual search, in Gibbon’s phrase, for ‘new enemies and new subjects’ was not a policy, weighed against alternatives; it was a law of life, the principle that animated what had now become a large and complex society.”



Map 1



or the English state somehow *not* live for war? Were the sheriffs of England not also both policemen and soldiers? Were Peter the Hermit, who led a group of peasants against seasoned *delis*, others who led Christian children on suicidal crusades, and numerous Christian extremists not just as fanatically committed to their faith as were frenzied Ottoman soldiers? Bayezid I may or may not have proclaimed “For this was I born, to bear arms,” as the same recent text avows.² Is it any less likely, however, that Bayezid’s contemporaries in late feudal Europe would have uttered the same words? Many of the protagonists in William Shakespeare’s history plays espouse soldierly virtues. Some, such as Coriolanus (even though his proud spirit in the end defeated him), certainly seemed born for war, and others, such as Henry V, seemed to become “kingly” only through the vehicle of war. Voltaire, perhaps cynically but certainly baldly, states that “the first who was king was a successful soldier. He who serves well his country has no need of ancestors,” a sentiment that Sir Walter Scott seconds: “What can they see in the longest kingly line in Europe, save that it runs back to a successful soldier?”³ Should we then believe that the Habsburg Charles V or the French Francis I were less bellicose than their Ottoman contemporary Süleyman (the Magnificent and Lawgiver)? The Ottoman state and society certainly was distinctive (what polity is not?). It was not, however, exceptional in its militarism, in its brutality, or, as others have claimed, in its misogyny or its sexual appetites, and it simply buys into Christian and Western legends to proclaim that such characteristics were somehow distinctly Ottoman.⁴

The existence of such Eurocentric mythologizing in scholarship is almost axiomatic.⁵ Particularly in the last four centuries – the conventionally labeled ages of European exploration, European expansion, European imperialism, and European retreat – especially western Europe has imagined itself politically, philosophically, and geographically at the

² Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons*, p. 66.

³ François Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Mérope, a tragedy*, by Aaron Hill, adapted for theatrical representation (London, 1795), Act I, sc. 3; and Sir Walter Scott, *Woodstock* (New York, 2001), Ch. 28.

⁴ The idea of an innate Ottoman military prowess persists to the present day, in the United States as well as Europe. On which see John M. VanderLippe, “The ‘Terrible Turk’: the formulation and perpetuation of a stereotype in American foreign policy,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 17(1997): 39–57.

⁵ On which see Thierry Hentsch, *Imagining the Middle East*, trans. Fred A. Reed (Montreal, 1992), pp. 1–48 and *passim*. The very idea of Eurocentrism also may be anachronistic for the early modern era, since Europe is a cultural and secular rather than a geographic notion and neither Christian nor Muslim imagined a “European” culture before the eighteenth century (see M. E. Yapp, “Europe in the Turkish mirror,” *Past and Present* 137[1992]: 134–55). There is, of course, a strong tendency to associate Europe with Christianity.

center of the world. Europeans and neo-Europeans in America and elsewhere have routinely judged art, literature, religion, statecraft, and technology according to their own authorities and criteria.⁶ It remains to this day a common conviction that few have measured up to these standards – certainly not the Ottomans with their menacing and seemingly “demonic religion” and “savage nomadic ways.” The academy no less than governments and the press has reflected this condescension, a coalition of points of view that has led to an almost irresistible temptation to view the globe “downward” from Paris and London or more recently Washington and New York. In this schema the Ottoman Empire joins the ranks of the “others” – exotic, inexplicable, unchanging, and acted upon by the powers of ruling authorities in Europe.

Such an attitude has been aptly designated as “orientalist” and has predisposed some historians to consider not only the Ottoman Empire but also other societies and ideas deemed “non-western” as peripheral to the concert of European states and their cultural satellites. In the Ottoman case as in others, scholars have tended to emphasize those aspects of society that are distinct from Europe. They have stressed that the Ottomans’ ethnicity, language, religion, and even organizational aptitude differed from the European standard. All too often, implicit in this fixation on divergence is an assumption of inferiority, of uncivilized savagery (such as the conventional if hackneyed argument that plunder was the exclusive stimulus for Ottoman empire-building). As Said has pointed out: “Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma.” He perhaps too categorically specifies that “until the end of the seventeenth century the ‘Ottoman peril’ lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger, and in time European civilization incorporated that period and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life.” This author further argues that “like Walter Scott’s Saracens, the European representation of the Muslim, Ottoman, or Arab was always a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient, and to a certain extent the same is true of the methods of contemporary learned Orientalists.”⁷

Certainly, as Said contends, many within European society grew to dread the Ottoman giant to its east. Nevertheless, this attitude was not fixed; nor did it ever become nearly as hegemonic as he suggests.⁸ Not

⁶ The British treatment of India is a celebrated case, on which see Jyotsna G. Singh, *Colonial narratives, cultural dialogues: “discoveries” of India in the languages of colonialism* (London and New York, 1996).

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), pp. 59–60.

⁸ On which see Hentsch, *Imagining the Middle East*.

only must one generally differentiate the attitudes of northern from Mediterranean Europe, but those western Europeans who experienced the Ottoman Empire first-hand often regarded it with respect, albeit with some apprehension. Furthermore, political philosophers who read these travelers' thoughtful texts, such as Guillaume Postel and Jean Bodin, helped nourish an esteem for many Ottoman institutions through their own writings. Nevertheless, the proclivity of historians to envisage the Empire as ignoble and antithetical to "refined" Western standards undoubtedly has obscured the nuances of Ottoman civilization as well as the many common elements between it and the rest of Europe.

Europe viewed from afar

We are not compelled to view the world from such a western-European perspective. The physical world has neither apex nor nadir, and it makes just as much geographic sense, to take an equally arbitrary case, to study the Far West (western Europe) from the viewpoint of the Near West (the Ottoman Empire) as it does to foreground the successor states of Christendom. If we imagine Istanbul rather than Paris at the middle of the world, Ottoman relations with the rest of Europe assume a startling character.

Historians customarily describe the Turkoman incursions into Anatolia and the Balkans as barbarian plunderings; however, one can just as easily imagine them as the foundation for a new and liberating empire. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans is typically portrayed as a catastrophe for western civilization; however, one might as readily see in the change of regime the rebirth of a splendid city long severed from its life-giving hinterlands.⁹ The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans is often imagined as a suspension of that region's history, the immobilization of a society imprisoned for several centuries in the "yoke" of an exogenous and ungodly conqueror. With a change of perspective, however, one might regard the societal commingling and cultural blending that accompanied the infusion of Ottoman civilization into Europe as an explosion of vigor and creativity. The Ottoman Empire conventionally has been seen as a persecutor of Christians, but one might judge it instead a

⁹ The very nomenclature for this city is muddled by rival claims to it (most powerfully, Greek versus Turkish). We will here refer to Ottoman Constantinople (also sometimes called "Byzantium") as Istanbul, even though the Ottomans themselves seem to have continued to use the term "Constantinople," but in a rather specific meaning. They usually referred by it to the old city together with all its suburbs (Eyüb, Galata, and Üsküdar), and used "Istanbul" more in reference to the city within the Byzantine walls (on which see Daniel Goffman, *Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 1642–1660* [Seattle, WA, 1998], pp. 33–35). For the sake of simplicity, this book will call the city "Constantinople" when discussing its Byzantine period and "Istanbul" when discussing its Ottoman one.

haven for runaways from a fiercely intolerant Christian Europe. After all, whereas in the Ottoman world there were thousands of renegades from Christendom, one almost never discovers in Christian Europe converts from Islam.¹⁰

Such an Ottomancentric perspective would reveal a relationship in which the ideological walls that seemed to divide Christian Europe from the Ottoman Empire instead become the framework to a rich and intricate representation. This is not to deny that a chasm existed at the ideological level; at least at the societal level, there never has been an enduring rapprochement between the Christian and Islamic worldviews. Nevertheless, a host of common interests always counterbalanced this doctrinal abyss.

The great spiritual divide

The historiography of Ottoman relations with the rest of Europe typically features religion. This focus makes sense given the historical consciousnesses of the two civilizations. On the one hand the Ottoman rulers recast their state from a nomadic and frontier principality into the primary heir to a religious foundation that had raised its edifice on previously Byzantine and Latin territories. This ability to remake its ideology by drawing upon Islam's Arab and expansionist heritage helped to give the Ottoman Empire its celebrated resilience, flexibility, and longevity. In contrast, those states with which the Ottomans shared the early modern Mediterranean world – whether Byzantine, Latin, or Habsburg – used religious ideology to legitimize their own regimes and to mobilize their populations in their struggles against Islam.

It thus makes good sense to highlight religion as a fundamental building block of civilizations that predated the Ottoman, Venetian, and Habsburg hegemonies. After all, early modern Europe emerged from a Christian ecumene that had helped define and grant legitimacy to a medieval Europe that presided over several crusades against Islam. Although the transformations of the Renaissance and the Reformation shook that world to its core, Christian Europe – particularly in its relations with non-Christian societies – continued to cast its existence in terms of a “universal” faith. The most visible manifestation of this obsession was the late Crusades, which continued to sputter well into the fifteenth century (“holy” alliances endured even longer) and whose nemesis and anticipated final victim was meant to be the Ottoman polity.

¹⁰ On this topic, see Peter Lamborn Wilson's intriguing *Pirate utopias: Moorish corsairs and European renegades* (Brooklyn, NY, 1995); and, for the specific example of England, Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York, 1999).

The Ottoman Empire, meanwhile, surfaced as an amalgam of many cultures and traditions. Its legitimacy, however, also was rooted in a “universal” belief – the faith of Islam, which normatively at least came to condemn change (*bida'*) itself. Because the sultans conceived of themselves and their society as Muslim and of their state as Islamic, each monarch had to comply, or appear to comply, with the laws of his faith (the Shariah). Every innovation demanded a justification in terms of the doctrines of Islam. The strictures of the religion manifested themselves in myriad ways, guided the maturation of Ottoman society, and limited the direction of Ottoman expansion.

The early Ottomans for example may have considered themselves “*gazi*” warriors, who justified bloodshed through faith.¹¹ Such a self-image would have demanded an unrelenting onslaught against the infidel and at the same time made it awkward to attack even the most troublesome rival Islamic state unless the government could demonstrate clear and unambiguous cause. The actuality seems to differ from this reconstruction. While the *gazi* credo would have justified Ottoman strikes against Byzantine borderlands, the Ottoman conquests also produced a subject people who were more and more non-Muslim. The new state had to learn and practice tolerance in order to survive. It recast the Shariah as it did so.

The spiritual bases of Christian Europe and the Muslim Ottoman Empire were remarkably similar. Unlike other major religions such as Hinduism or Taoism, Islam and Christianity are rooted in essentially the same Near Eastern and unitary doctrine. It is thus not only reasonable – but quite fruitful – to conceive and study a “Greater Western World” which encompassed the followers of both Jesus and Muhammed. This similarity, however, does not connote harmony. Just as siblings often fight with appalling brutality, the very resemblance and historical proximity of the two faiths created a bitter rivalry. This hostility is depicted forcefully in Christian and Muslim representations of the biblical tale of Isaac and Ismael. In the Judeo-Christian version, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his son by his wife Sarah, in order to prove his faith. In the Islamic version, however, it becomes Ismael, Abraham’s elder son by his maid-servant Hagar, who is to be sacrificed. In other words, for Christians, the younger brother is the pivotal character in this story, but for Muslims the elder brother is the key figure.¹² It is not that Muslims repudiate the tradition that Isaac became the patriarch for the Hebrew people. The Qur’an

¹¹ This image is under attack, however, to the degree that a new synthesis may be emerging that largely repudiates it. See Chapter 2 below.

¹² See Carol L. Delaney, *Abraham on trial* (Princeton, 1998).

does insist, however, that Ismael serves a similar, and consequently historically central, role for the Arab people. Two branches of the same tree, the religions constituted aggressive monotheisms, and they fiercely repudiated, persecuted, and negated rival creeds, most particularly each other. It is through this prism of sanguine arrogance that scholarship has routinely viewed, portrayed, and artificially divided the Ottoman from the rest of the European world.

The Euro-Ottoman symbiosis

In some ways, then, Ottoman and other European communities were hostile to each other. This temperament is explicitly and vividly displayed in the battles of Kosovo and Varna, the investment of Constantinople, the assault against Malta, the sieges of Vienna, and countless other aggressions. In other ways, however, the two civilizations were more symbiotic, seeming almost to converge in some arenas. Such intersections of character and purpose have been too little studied. They are most visible, perhaps, in the economic sphere, in which trade within the Mediterranean basin served to bind the two worlds, operating not only through the “spices” that Europeans coveted and long could gain only from Ottoman cities, but also, and especially after the sixteenth century, through bulkier commodities such as dried fruits, cottons, and grains.

Although western Europeans were the more eager to sustain and develop commercial relations because the Islamic world distributed the desired goods of Asia, it was the Ottoman rendering of the role of the non-Muslims in an Islamic society that fashioned the link. Late medieval European Christians often managed relations with the “other,” particularly the Jew and the Muslim, by vigorous persecution and expulsion. The Ottomans handled their “others” less violently by asserting a theoretical Muslim superiority – signified by a head-tax upon non-Muslims and certain often symbolic sumptuary restrictions – and simultaneously practicing a nearly absolute but effective disregard in which the various religions, ethnicities, and aliens within the empire co-existed and commingled virtually at will.

Paradoxically this cultural convergence, in which the Ottomans integrated non-Muslims into the economic life of the community, is best articulated along the political and commercial frontiers, where Ottoman warriors simultaneously engaged in endemic conflict with Byzantine, Hungarian, Venetian, and Habsburg forces and fraternized with fellow Christian inhabitants. Particularly upon the military marches that for centuries demarcated first Byzantine and Ottoman Anatolia and then the Catholic and Ottoman Balkans, each side accommodated and even



1 This frontispiece juxtaposes the Habsburg emperor with the Ottoman sultan. Unlike many such depictions, there is no suggestion here of nobility versus malevolence. Both monarchs look regal and carry emblems of office; the *matériel* of war illustrated in the upper corners – battle axe, drum, and pistol for the emperor’s armies and scimitar, bow and arrow, and pistol for the sultan’s – are both neutrally rendered. Boissard, *Vitae et icones sultanorum turcico*.

assimilated the other’s techniques and cultures.¹³ Societies promptly accommodated whichever state ruled over them, warriors crept back and forth across a divide that proved remarkably porous, and, surprisingly,

¹³ Cemal Kafadar has cogently argued such a symbiosis in *Between two worlds: the construction of the Ottoman state* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995), especially pp. 19–28. See also

that great segregator religion itself slipped into a latitudinarianism that facilitated borderland communication and even sometimes blurred the distinction between Christianity and Islam.

The Ottoman Empire itself originated as such a society. It was born in the fourteenth-century middle grounds between the Byzantine and Seljuk Empires where it was one of a throng of petty and semi-autonomous Turkoman emirates crowded into western Anatolia. Here, its leaders vied with the emirs of Karasi, Menteşeoğlu, Aydınoğlu, Saruhanoğlu, and others for lucre and fame, struggled against the Byzantine Empire and various Latin states to enlarge their frontiers, and almost indiscriminately snatched from the venerable domains that enveloped them the most useful doctrines, weapons, and political formations. More than any other quality, the responsive plasticity that emerged in this milieu explains the astonishing achievements of Osman, the eponymous Ottoman, and his heirs.

Associations between the Ottoman Empire and the other states of Europe extended beyond commercial exchange and military campaign. The territories, indeed the very institutions, of the Ottoman Empire were in some ways successors to the Byzantine Empire, which, as an heir to Rome, was the most revered of European states. Not only did both the Byzantine and Ottoman political entities utilize a religious ideology as the glue for a vast territory and a diverse population, but also the Ottomans came to rule over virtually the same domains and peoples as had Constantine's eastern Roman heirs 1,000 years before. Furthermore, the successor state adopted much of the Byzantine tax structure through the utilization of customary law, which the Ottomans blended into sultanic law as a complement to Islamic law.¹⁴

This is not to say that the Ottoman polity constituted no more than a superimposed image of its immediate predecessor. It did not. Not only did the empire rely upon traditions from its own central-Asian past, but it also embraced Persian (particularly financial and political) and Arab (particularly spiritual) legacies.¹⁵ The Ottomans fused these heritages

Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's unruly friends: dervish groups in the Islamic later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City, 1994).

¹⁴ Halil İnalcık, "Suleiman the lawgiver and Ottoman law," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 1 (1969): 105–38, and chapter 3 below.

¹⁵ On the controversy over the roots of Ottoman law, see Halil İnalcık, "The Ottoman succession and its relation to the Turkish concept of sovereignty," in *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: essays on economy and society* (Bloomington, IN, 1993), pp. 37–69. The question of Ottoman origins and legacy has been thoroughly politicized. On origins, see Herbert A. Gibbons, *The foundation of the Ottoman Empire* (Oxford, 1916); Fuat M. Köprülü, *The origins of the Ottoman Empire*, trans. and ed. Gary Leiser (Albany, NY, 1992); Paul Wittek, *The rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1938); Rudi P. Lindner, *Nomads and Ottomans in medieval Anatolia* (Bloomington, IN, 1983); and Kafadar, *Between two worlds*; on legacy, see L. Carl Brown (ed.), *Imperial legacy: the Ottoman imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East* (New York, 1996).

together with the Byzantine one into a unique order that endured for half a millennium. The threads of Ottoman legitimacy thus converged from the east, from the south, and from the north. Nevertheless the chief impression, at least from the perspective of much of Europe, was that the Ottoman Empire was the Byzantine Empire reborn, even though this rebirth may have appeared misshapen. When viewed from the West the Ottoman polity seemed to have arisen like a monster out of the Byzantine ashes. Evil or not, as the successor to a major Christian and Mediterranean civilization, both European and Ottoman considered the new state very much a part of the European world. Although many western Europeans hated it on ideological grounds, most also acknowledged that the empire could not be ignored, and some even grasped that it could not easily be expunged. Ways were found to accommodate it.

Istanbul: the middle city

Constantinople (Ottoman Istanbul) epitomized this physical and emotional integration into Europe. With the temporary exceptions of Iberia under Islam and the Syrian coast under the crusader states, an oceanic barrier had long separated the Christian and Islamic worlds. This obstacle swept in a roughly diagonal arc across the Mediterranean Sea from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Straits of the Dardanelles. Since the time of Muhammed the northeastern foundation of this buttress had been the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople was Europe's "line in the sand." Boundaries between Christendom and Islam may have ebbed and flowed elsewhere (and chiefly in Iberia); here they remained fixed. With the conquest of that city in 1453 and the fall of Granada, the last Islamic state in Iberia, to the combined forces of Ferdinand and Isabella thirty-nine years later, the emotional nucleus of this cultural clash shifted from the southwestern to the southeastern European world.¹⁶

In European lore, Constantinople was the great successor to Rome. Its immense walls and access to both oversea and land-based hinterlands preserved Christendom during times of extreme danger. In the fourth and seventh centuries it had withstood the onslaughts of pagan Goths and Muslim Arabs and, despite succumbing to a ruinous Latin onslaught in the early thirteenth century, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it had stood as a bastion against the Mongol and Turkoman nomadic groups pushing westward across eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Byzantine defenses to the south and east may have crumbled, the walls of Byzantium

¹⁶ This, however, does not mean that fighting along the western borderlands ceased, on which see Andrew C. Hess, *The forgotten frontier: a history of the sixteenth-century Ibero-African frontier* (Chicago and London, 1978).

may have tottered, but time and again the city had weathered the attacks of its assailants. However estranged the western Latin and eastern Orthodox churches may have grown, one cannot overemphasize the physical and symbolic relevance of Byzantium to all of Christendom.

The city loomed almost as large in Islamic lore. Muhammed himself imagined it as the center of the world, and the Arab surges of the seventh and eighth centuries several times touched its walls. The first Umayyad Caliph Mu'awiyah in 670 led an assault that shattered against its walls; the yearlong siege of 716–17 proved no more successful. Thus the astonishing advance of Islam in its early years veered off toward India in the east and Iberia in the west. In the north, it faltered at Constantinople. That barricade held, the eastern Christian church survived, and two great monotheisms there faced each other – sometimes in hostility and sometimes in uneasy peace – for almost a millennium.

Constantinople was not only a religious symbol, however. Constantine had founded his capital on a finger of land that functioned almost as an isthmus at the intersection of two continents. As a geo-political fulcrum its location was strategic, its geographic position augmented its strength. Not only did the site control trade between the Black and Mediterranean Seas, and between Asia Minor and the Balkans, but it also could potentially rely upon a vast and sea borne provisioning zone stretching from the Crimean peninsula to Egypt and beyond. With its conquest Mehmed II (the Conqueror) not only fulfilled an Islamic aspiration but also liberated the imperial core of an empire that already encompassed much of that zone and enveloped most of the territory that formerly had been Byzantium.

Before 1453 it had been possible for Europeans to conceive the Turkic invaders – Seljuk as well as Ottoman – as a temporary setback, however prolonged, in the advance of Christendom. European states and peoples accommodated the troublesome nomads, even traded and made treaties with them. Few, however, accepted them as part of a fixed political landscape. After 1453 this worldview was hard to sustain. The Byzantine Empire had exploited Constantinople's unparalleled strategic location and had endured 1,000 years. Why would the Ottoman Empire not do the same?

Converging communities

The fall of Byzantine Constantinople seemed a horrifying and decisive turning point to many Europeans, an interpretation that most historians embrace. Nevertheless, the event liberated that city from a smothering encirclement. Somewhat paradoxically, it also inaugurated a merging of the Christian European and Ottoman worlds. Hostilities certainly continued.



2 As with most portraits of the early Ottoman sultans, this one of Sultan Mehmed Han, the conqueror of Constantinople, is highly stylized. Nevertheless, perhaps because of models based upon Gentile Bellini's work, this woodcut seems more realistic than most. Boissard, *Vitae et icones sultanorum turcico*, p. 41.

One cannot ignore Süleyman's campaigns in Hungary and his sieges of Vienna and Malta in the mid sixteenth century, or the explosive naval engagements that crested at Lepanto in 1571. Nevertheless, alliances, commerce, and the movements of peoples more and more institutionalized

and complicated relations between other European and Ottoman civilizations. In fact, in the economic, political, and even religious spheres the Ottomans assumed many of the duties that previously had characterized Byzantine relations with western Europe.

Before 1453, for example, Europe had usually taken the initiative in commerce that involved the southern (Islamic) Mediterranean basin. It had done so in part because, while it was virtually impossible for Muslims to trade and reside in most Christian lands, European Christians could live in many Islamic societies as “People of the Book,” that is, as those who heeded the sacred writings of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.¹⁷ In the late medieval Mamluk Empire, for example, quarters for Venetian and Genoese merchants existed in Alexandria, Aleppo, and elsewhere. More importantly, Europe simply produced little of interest to the peoples of the Islamic Middle East. Italian merchants who sought the silk, pepper, cinnamon, and other spices that flowed through Syrian and Egyptian ports had little other than bullion to offer in return. Although Muslims certainly were involved in this trade, their businesses tended to be stationary. It was merchants from the northwest who traversed the trading corridors of the Mediterranean.

Christian Europe did not suddenly begin drawing Muslim merchants after 1453. Nevertheless, after that date the initiative in commerce began to swing to the Ottoman Empire as Ottoman merchants began to venture into the European world. Those who did so, however, were rarely Muslim. It was other subjects of the socially complex empire – Armenian Christians, Greek Orthodox Christians, and Jews – who took advantage of their opportunity simultaneously to traverse the Ottoman domain and to organize trading networks across southern and western European port cities.¹⁸

The commerce of the Armenian middlemen originated in Persia, found in silk an eminently marketable commodity, and by the early seventeenth century had expanded to the farthest reaches of northern Europe and eastern Asia. In the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians constituted a Christian community to whom the government granted autonomy in religion, economic life, and even internal politics. Their religion also gave them access to the lands of Christian Europe. Thus, they moved easily in both societies.

The Ottoman polity served as the linchpin of this far-flung commercial network, granting Armenian traders a reliable anchorage as they pursued

¹⁷ Mark R. Cohen, *Under crescent and cross: the Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1994).

¹⁸ See on these networks Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-cultural trade in world history* (Cambridge, 1984).

their risky endeavors. Armenian peddlers, meanwhile, not only brought to the Ottomans knowledge of the East, but also helped couple the two religious segments of the Greater Western World. Armenians from Istanbul and Izmir journeyed to Venice, Livorno, Marseilles, even to Amsterdam and St. Petersburg. This trading network helped produce a uniform commercial method throughout the Mediterranean and European worlds, a technological and cultural interplay between the Ottoman Empire and the rest of Europe, and a new people – the Levantines – who eventually became the principal communicators between the two zones.

Such adaptable persons – those who can conform to two or more societies even as they remain distinct from each – have long been associated with international commerce, whose merchants must be polyglot and compliant in order to survive. Economically at least such marginality virtually defined the Jewish community as it existed in both Christian and Ottoman Europe.¹⁹ In each situation, the Jews constituted a religious minority, politically dominated by a rival monotheism. As such, they had to be familiar with and willing to adjust to their hosts' societies, and they had to be conversant in their languages. The irony is that even as both Christians and Muslims exhibited much the same hostility toward the Jews as they felt toward each other, Jews – particularly as traders and especially during the great confrontations of the sixteenth century – became instrumental in bridging the ideological chasm that separated much of Europe and the Ottoman Empire.²⁰

Repercussions from the conquest of Constantinople proved crucial in the development of trans-Mediterranean commerce. Before 1453, Mediterranean Jewry existed in at least three distinct communities – the Spanish-speaking Iberian, the Arab-speaking Egyptian and Syrian, and the Greek-speaking Byzantine. After 1453, these communal lines became blurred. First of all, Sultan Mehmed II's policy of resettling in Istanbul Jews from the Balkans and Anatolia created a new mix of Jews of Ashkenazic (German), Romaniot (Greek), and Karaite (heterodox) origin. Secondly, the Christian reconquest of Iberia and the resultant policy of repression (culminating in the Spanish expulsion of Jews in 1492) pushed thousands of Sephardic Jews into Ottoman domains. Thirdly, the conquests of Syria and Egypt in 1516–17 transferred the ancient Arab-Jewish community into Ottoman hands.²¹

By 1550 these communities had fused into an uneasy amalgam that drew upon the various civilizations of Europe as well as the Middle East to

¹⁹ On which, see Cohen, *Under crescent and cross*.

²⁰ For the sixteenth century in particular, see Benjamin Arbel, *Trading nations: Jews and Venetians in the early modern eastern Mediterranean* (Leiden, 1995).

²¹ Avigdor Levy, *The sephardim in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 1992).

fashion a new society. Particularly its Sephardic elements helped adapt the Christian-European and Ottoman administrations and economies to each other's commercial norms. Through Jews residing in Venice, Bordeaux, Amsterdam, and London, Ottoman subjects for the first time reciprocated the foreign settlements in Istanbul, Izmir, Aleppo, and Alexandria. Ottoman Jewish subjects made good use of the knowledge gained by direct exposure to southern and western Europe. They involved themselves in Ottoman textile production and employed western-European commercial techniques to compete with western-European merchants. Jews also bought positions in Ottoman finances and negotiated with Venetian, French, English, and Dutch merchants over customs dues, and Jewish brokers, factors, and translators represented foreign merchants and diplomats in Ottoman towns and villages and before Ottoman officials. Through their ventures – often in concert with Ottoman Arab Muslims, Armenian Christians, Orthodox Greeks, and Turkish Muslims – commercial relations became cultural ties. Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Ottomans involved themselves in these exchanges and built and crossed economic, cultural, and political bridges by doing so.

The heyday for Greek Orthodox commerce did not arrive until the eighteenth century, when the Phanariot of Istanbul linked up with co-religionists in Ottoman outports not only to dominate seaborne commerce within the Ottoman Mediterranean world, but also to direct the government's fiscal procedures and even challenge the Atlantic seaboard states in their own entrepôts. Even earlier, however, Greek Orthodox merchants had managed the intra-imperial carrying trade, Greek brokers had controlled commercial exchanges in many Ottoman port towns, and it had been Greek sailors who helped found and long remained the backbone of Ottoman naval and merchant marines.²²

Thus, even as Sultan Süleyman challenged Emperor Charles V on the Mediterranean Sea and in the Balkans militarily and ideologically, Ottoman subjects busily wove together the commercial and social fabrics of Ottoman and Christian Europe. Religious discord often collided with personal interests in the streets of Istanbul, Aleppo, and Salonika as well as among directors of trading companies and in the councils of state, especially the Sublime Porte. The Armenian, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, and even inchoate Muslim trading diasporas eased communication and encouraged among these circles a more cohesive outlook. If inter-relationships between the states of southern Europe and the Ottoman Empire had been piecemeal and largely theoretical in the fifteenth century, by the end of the

²² See, however, Palmira Brummett, *Ottoman seapower and Levantine diplomacy in the Age of Discovery* (Albany, NY, 1994) for a somewhat contrary view.

sixteenth century a wide gamut of interests had entwined the Ottomans into the European order of states and economies. The economic and social crises to come jarred this system. What emerged by 1700, however, was an almost universal perception of the Ottoman Empire as a European state.

A changing image in Europe

Modern historians, however, rarely imagine the Ottoman Empire even in this period as a part of Europe, an area that they associate with crisis, change, and improvement (the obverse of the fantasy of an immutable Orient). Virulent religious wars concluded the sixteenth century; the brutal Thirty Years War helped usher in the next lengthy conflict. Drastic transformations occurred in food production, demographics, global commerce, and governance. Commonwealths arose in England and the Netherlands; governments became more centralized. These mutations concocted a Europe that in 1700 looked radically different than it had in 1500, a transformation that some historians have interpreted teleologically as a climb toward modernity or some other stated or implied goal. Most of these changes touched the Ottoman Empire as much as they did the rest of Europe. Nevertheless, even when scholars do acknowledge these developments, in this “oriental” context the influences are said to have marked decay rather than signaled progress.

Such a conclusion is not unreasonable when one considers how dramatically the Ottoman Empire’s relationship with the rest of Europe had changed. The military balance certainly had shifted decisively toward the West, and Christian Europeans no longer feared that the “Turk” would sweep westward, despoiling, plundering, enslaving, and converting. It is not tenable, however, to see in this new balance an absolute Ottoman decline. Just as Spain, Portugal, or the Italian states responded differently and less successfully to the seventeenth century crises than did England or France, so did the Ottoman Empire. In no case did these Mediterranean states become less a part of the Greater Western World; in no case were they abandoned or forgotten by the rest of Europe.

In the Ottoman instance, the advance toward integration in fact quickened during the seventeenth century. This circumstance has not often been noted, perhaps because it was not reflected in the policies of the Ottoman state, which sought to “reform” itself to past days of glory and did not begin emulating innovations in the rest of Europe until the following century. Rather than the government assuming the lead, Ottoman subjects and foreigners residing in Mediterranean port cities and along Balkan borderlands intensified their dialogues and carved out commercial

and social enclaves along the Ottoman frontiers. In these provincial milieus, Jews and Muslims began to lose their commercial pre-eminence as cross-cultural communicators to others who were less dependent upon the goodwill of the Ottoman central government.

This transfer of economic power from one Ottoman subject people to another also helped weaken the Ottoman state (but perhaps not Ottoman society), for, as one consequence of the new association between western European and local Ottoman merchants and officials, Istanbul began to lose control over customs and other revenues. The resulting economic and political decentralization proved advantageous to many Ottoman subjects, and helped further integrate the Ottoman economy with the rest of Europe. Not only Armenians and Greek Orthodox Christians, but also Englishmen, Dutchmen, and Frenchmen muscled aside Jewish and Muslim middlemen and assumed dominant stations in the new Levantine world being fashioned by their multiple alliances. The changes simultaneously affecting both Ottoman and western European society facilitated the abilities of these Levantines to communicate. For example, Englishmen fleeing the upheavals of their civil wars in the 1640s experienced and could exploit the similar disturbances contemporaneously jarring the Ottoman world.²³

It is probably accurate to imagine the Ottoman Empire as non-European before the late 1400s. Although the two entities already shared much, their ideological, political, military, economic, and historical dissimilarities remained overwhelming. Over the next centuries, however, the Ottoman Empire and other parts of Europe learned from and more and more resembled each other. Differences remained, particularly in the ideological realm. Although few eighteenth-century western Europeans referred any longer to the Ottomans as the terror of Europe, as had Richard Knolles in the late sixteenth century,²⁴ the image that replaced it – the sick man of Europe – was hardly any more positive and was more inclusive only in a negative sense. Not respect or inclusion but contempt replaced fear in the minds of many Christian Europeans.

Nevertheless, the dense reality simply did not fit this simple-minded construct – expressed by contemporaries and twentieth-century historians alike – of a religious animosity that engendered almost complete separation. However reluctantly, the rest of Europe learned to accept its Ottoman slice as a successor to Byzantium. Dutch, English, French, and Venetian ambassadors resided in Istanbul, and the Ottomans became

²³ Goffman, *Britons*.

²⁴ *The generall historie of the Turkes*, 2nd edn (London, 1610), “Introduction to the Christian reader,” as quoted in Christine Woodhead, “‘The present terrour of the world?’ contemporary views of the Ottoman Empire c. 1600,” *History* 72(1987): 20.

part – perhaps even the core – of the diplomatic system that had arisen out of Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Armenian, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish Ottoman merchants roamed Mediterranean and even Atlantic waters. Islam and Judaism were acknowledged (if not accepted) as part of the re-evaluation of the relationship between religion and society that accompanied the early modern collapse of the Catholic ecumene. Even ideologically, then, differences receded and the two societies more and more resembled each other. An examination of this state of affairs opens for the historian a new world of research and interpretation.